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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDING CAPTION)

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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: VIOLENCE AGAINST IRAQI CHRISTIANS DROPS  
DRAMATICALLY IN 2009

REF: A. 09 BAGHDAD 2473  
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 19

Classified By: Political Counselor Yuri Kim for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Despite a recent up-tick in violence against Christians living in Ninewa over the past two months, a new report by an Iraqi NGO indicates that the number of Iraqi Christians killed has dropped by 82 percent since 2007. In addition, top officials at the non-Muslim Endowment report greater intelligence-sharing and coordination with the MOI, and have confirmed that 500 Christians have been officially hired by the MOI to serve in the Facility Protection Service (FPS) to guard Christian places of worship in Baghdad. Nevertheless, the security of Iraq's Christian community remains fragile, as evidenced by a recent spate of murders and bombings targeting the community in Ninewa. Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have responded to the recent attacks by increasing security in Christian areas of Mosul. END SUMMARY.

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VIOLENCE AGAINST CHRISTIANS SINCE 2003 BY THE NUMBERS  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) A recent report issued by the Hammurabi Human Rights Organization (HHRO), an Iraqi NGO headed by prominent Iraqi Christian activist William Warda that has tracked violence against Iraq's Christian community since 2003, indicates a substantial decline in the number of murders and kidnappings of Iraqi Christians in 2009 as compared to previous years. According to HHRO's overall figures, a total of 722 Iraqi Christians have been killed since 2003, including 537 who were targeted for sectarian reasons and 126 killed in terrorist attacks intended to kill civilians writ large. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of the violence took place in Baghdad (52 percent) and Ninewa (29 percent) where Iraq's largest Christian communities are located. Breaking down the violence by year, the report identifies 74 Christians killed in 2003, 211 in 2004, 98 in 2005, 79 in 2006, 156 in 2007, 75 in 2008, and 28 in 2009. The report shows similar declines in kidnappings since 2007, with 12 Iraqi Christians reported kidnapped in 2009 as compared to 25 in 2008, and 87 in 2007. In other words, according to the HHRO study, killings of Iraqi Christians have dropped by 82 percent and kidnappings by 86 percent over the past two years, an indication that Iraq's Christian community has benefited from the overall security gains achieved in Iraq during the same time period. The overall fatality figure in Iraq due to sectarian and criminal violence for 2009 was 3,119 persons killed according to the Iraq Coalition Casualty Count organization which tracks open source media ([www.icasualties.com](http://www.icasualties.com)).

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MOI AND CHRISTIAN ENDOWMENT STRENGTHEN COOPERATION  
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¶3. (C) After a series of coordinated attacks against six Christian churches in July 2009 that left four dead and 20 injured, the GOI, in response to a request from the non-Muslim Endowment, moved to hire an additional 500 Christians into the MOI's Facility Protection Service (FPS) as well as to assign security details to protect Iraq's most prominent Christian leaders (reftel A). On December 15, the Director of the Christian Endowment, Ra'ad Shammaa, told Poloff that the MOI had passed along threat intelligence to the Endowment regarding impending attacks on Christian churches and had increased security as a result. (NOTE: There were in fact two attacks in the vicinity of churches in Ninewa subsequent to this conversation, one on December 15 QNinewa subsequent to this conversation, one on December 15 that resulted in five deaths and one on December 23 that resulted in two dead, although none of those killed were from the Christian community. END NOTE.). On January 13, the Director of the umbrella non-Muslim Endowment, Abdullah al-Naufali, told Poloff that the new guards had been officially added to the MOI payroll as of early December and were able to provide security at churches throughout Baghdad for the Christmas holidays.

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VIOLENCE IN NINEWA ON RISE, BUT ISF RESPONDING  
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¶4. (S/NF) While expressing satisfaction with the situation in Baghdad, Naufali commented that Arab-Kurd tensions in Ninewa had impeded the GOI's plan to hire more Christians, leaving the overall number of Christians in the Ninewa-based ISF at ¶400. Asked whether the Endowment would seek to repair churches damaged in recent bombings in Mosul, Naufali said the security situation remained too tenuous to begin any reconstruction projects. Indeed, in addition to the bombings, the murder of seven Iraqi Christians (and one other

attempted murder) between December 9 and January 18 is an indication of the fragility of the security situation facing the Christian community in Ninewa (reftel B). (NOTE: According to a USF-I Joint Intelligence Operations Center assessment, the recent up-tick in violence against Christians in Ninewa has been perpetrated by al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) as an attempt to increase sectarian violence in the area and generate funds from extortion to finance other terrorist operations. Many of the Christian victims were businessmen killed in their stores. END NOTE). The PM's Advisor for Christian Affairs, Georges Bakoos, conceded to Poloff on February 2 that the ISF had still not established effective control in Mosul and that this was allowing AQI to target the Christian community there.

¶5. (S) In response to the spate of attacks on Iraqi Christians, Ninewa Governor Atheel al-Najafi promised additional security measures (reftel B). On January 18, Ninewa Operations Command (NOC) Commander Major General Hassan Karim Khudayir ordered additional security measures for Christian communities and churches, including more patrols and vehicle searches. The same day, in a conversation with USD-N Deputy CG, NOC Deputy Commander Major General Abdul Raheem said he did not want the Christians of Mosul to be forced to leave the city and that while AQI targeted the entire population, the minority communities must be especially protected.

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POLITICAL LEADERS CONDEMN THE VIOLENCE  
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¶6. (SBU) On January 20 according to media reports, DPM Rafi'e al-Issawi met with a delegation of Christian leaders and stressed the need to stand against terrorist forces that were trying to undermine Iraqi unity. On January 21, Ninewa Governor Nujafi, Deputy Governor Faysal al-Yawer and members of the Ninewa PC held a meeting with a group of Christian and Muslim clergy as well as tribal sheiks to discuss the ongoing violence. Afterwards, the participants issued a joint statement condemning the violence and calling for peaceful

coexistence between Christians and Muslims.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: Violence against Iraqi Christians and Iraq's other minority communities remains a serious concern, as evidenced by AQI's targeted campaign of violence over the past two months, which represent a nasty spike on an otherwise relatively positive trendline. Nevertheless, the large reductions in violence against Iraqi Christians as documented by the HHRO over the past two years represent solid evidence that the overall improvement in Iraq's security situation has also benefited the Christian community. The fact that Christian leaders report that the MOI is sharing threat intelligence with them and that ISF commanders in Ninewa are taking steps to prevent additional attacks are other encouraging signs. The recent addition of 500 Christian FPS personnel to the MOI should help to further solidify security gains in Baghdad. Further improvements in overall security in Ninewa may be forthcoming with the implementation of the Combined Security Mechanism, which entails the establishment of joint ISF-Peshmerga checkpoints and security patrols. END COMMENT.  
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